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Representations of Child Abuse in Quebec Print Media and the Integration of Child Psychological Ill-Treatment into the Youth Protection Act: When Distancing Abusive Families Matters More

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The media has played an important role in raising the public awareness and knowledge on child abuse. Yet, we do not know how child psychological maltreatment was presented in the media and how it might colour our common understanding of the problem. This article presents the results of a qualitative research on social representations of child psychological maltreatment in the Quebec media. More specifically, the study aimed to investigate how child abuse and child psychological maltreatment were presented in the Quebec media when psychological maltreatment was formally integrated into the Youth Protection Act in 2006. 85 newspaper articles were analyzed. We identified various forms of anchoring and objectivation of social representations, including the emotional anchoring and objectivation of abuse in moral outrage, compassion, and fear, as well as various metaphors, personifications, and antinomies related to the issue. Cross-sectional analysis of the data revealed the thematic anchoring of representations of child maltreatment in the thêmata self/other and justice/injustice. This article discusses the implications of these results regarding social exclusion and the othering process of marginalized groups. Finally, we will address the repercussions of these thêmata on current solutions and action plans to end child abuse and maltreatment.

Keywords: child psychological maltreatment, social representations, media, youth protection act, youth protection services, Quebec

Highlights

- Media narratives foster a strong othering process of abusive families;
- Child psychological ill-treatment is considered as equally important as child abuse;
- Social representations of child abuse support the belief that it is incurable;
- Social representations of child abuse mostly serve to protect the in-group's identity;
- Media narratives on child abuse foster a crisis mentality about the problem.

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Introduction

In 2006, child psychological maltreatment[1] was integrated into the Quebec Youth Protection Act (YPA) as a situation that may lead to the endangerment of a child's security or development. In Quebec's legislation, this constitutes the first formal recognition of child psychological maltreatment as a form of child abuse that could require the State's intervention to protect children.

Researchers and practitioners, mostly doctors, documented the serious and deleterious effects of child psychological maltreatment long before its formal legal incorporation (Hacking, 1999; Hart & Brassard, 1991; Labbé, 2019). Nevertheless, official recognition of child psychological maltreatment through various child protection legal reforms only started in the late 1990s throughout North America (Trocmé et al., 2011). In fact, integrating child psychological maltreatment into the YPA constituted quite an important shift from a legal perspective (Joyal, 2000; 2002). As explained by Joyal (2000; 2002), Quebec jurists and legislators sensed it would allow for too much intrusion of the State into the private life of families. For others, this type of flux in the definition of child abuse and its forms shows how politicized the entire issue of child abuse actually is (Cradock, 2014; Hacking, 1991). Today, the recognition of child psychological abuse as a form of child abuse is quite consensual (Brassard, Hart, & Glaser, 2020). Moreover, since its integration into the YPA, child psychological maltreatment has been the object of a constant increase in reports (while other forms have decreased) (Clément, Julien, Lévesque, & Flores, 2019).

But how was this form of maltreatment, often considered more subtle and difficult to recognize or witness, presented and explained to the public?

The study of media is relevant for exploring the integration of new ideas or novel notions into common sense. Indeed, not only is the media an arena for public debate, but it forms the primary window through which the general public learns about political or scientific matters, including child abuse (Thompson, 1995). In addition, the media has historically been a prominent social actor in raising social awareness and reactions to child abuse. In the same way, they were also influential in the development of social movements and organizations aimed at protecting children, particularly through the coverage of horrific child abuse stories. For example, in the United States (USA), media coverage of the Mary Ellen Wilson case prompted the foundation of the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children in 1874, the first of over 300 similar private societies in North America (Horowitz, 2014; Labbé, 2019). Almost a century later, in 1962, *Time*, *Newsweek*, and other major newspapers covered the conclusions of Kempe, Silverman, and their colleagues (1962), which launched a new era in the social and political response to child abuse. Indeed, the 1960s and 1970s were marked by the adoption of several laws and legal reforms aimed at protecting children in the USA and Canada. Concurrently, the subject of child abuse became widely and massively publicized (Horowitz, 2014). For Hacking (1999), child abuse became one of the most sensible problems of our time. As he previously stated (Hacking, 1991), it is also "in our current reckoning, the worst of private evils" (p. 253). Indeed, there is an undeniable consensus on the fact that child abuse is wrong and that we need to help those who are being victimized.

Moreover, the influence of the media is not only historical. More recently, media coverage of child abuse cases was linked to a significant increase in reports to child protection agencies in Quebec (Saint-Jacques,

[1] In this article, the terms psychological maltreatment and psychological ill-treatment are used as synonyms. The terms psychological abuse or emotional abuse have been avoided in order to include both direct and indirect forms of psychological violence.

Villeneuve, Turcotte, Drapeau, & Ivers, 2012). In the past two decades, the covering of child protection services malpractices and errors has also been decisive in triggering investigations and reforms (Jagannathan & Camasso, 2013). More critical researchers show that media coverage of child abuse distorts the public understanding of the issue (Horowitz, 2014; Lonne & Gillespie, 2014). Horowitz (2014) talked about a "persistent hysteria and irrationality about this issue" (p. 79). In fact, many authors refer to the notion of "moral panic", first developed by Stanley Cohen in 1972, to depict a situation that arises when social problems emerge as the focus of intense and widespread fear and panic (e.g. Horowitz, 2014; Wilczynski & Sinclair, 1999). Elsewhere, Lonne and Parton (2014) also showed how media significantly influences beliefs about the solutions to the problem of child abuse, with a major emphasis on social control measures and the removal of children from their parental custody. In the same vein, the authors also show how the media contributes to lowering public confidence in protective institutions (Lonne & Parton, 2014).

To clarify, the media has brought child abuse to be debated in the public sphere, thus transforming it into a public issue. In doing so, the media allowed novel ideas and notions related to child abuse to integrate commonsense knowledge (Moscovici, 1975). This is particularly true with regard to child physical and sexual abuse. However, studies do not distinguish media coverage in relation to the type of abuse perpetrated (Horowitz, 2014; Wilczynski & Sinclair, 1999). Hence, we do not know if this "moral panic" and "persistent hysteria" still stand for other forms of child abuse, namely child psychological maltreatment, and how it may affect commonsense understanding of the problem.

The aim of this article is to present the results of a study whose objective was to understand how child psychological maltreatment integrated commonsense knowledge through media[2]. Specifically, we documented the mobilization of social representations and representational dynamics in Quebec's mass media in the years surrounding the integration of child psychological ill-treatment into the YPA. Our approach is founded on social representations theory and, more precisely, on Höijer's (2010; 2011) analytical model. First, we will focus on the relevance of studying representational dynamics in understanding how the media contributes to the construction of common sense and social representations. The subsequent sections will focus on our method and research results, followed by a discussion on our findings.

Social Representations Theory, Common Sense, and the Media

When he developed his Social Representations Theory, Moscovici was interested in the ways by which scientific knowledge integrated common sense in modern society. In his book entitled *Psychoanalysis, Its Image and Its Public* first published in 1961, he described how psychoanalytic knowledge and concepts had been appropriated in communications, common sense, and everyday thinking by various groups in France. Here, it is worth noting that Moscovici theoretical proposition is in opposition with the classical perception and consideration of common sense as an uninteresting "abyss of ignorance" (Moscovici, 1988, p. 216). As Moscovici explained in 1988, he "set out to investigate the place where social representations were generated, not where scientific knowledge was corrupted and distorted" (p. 216).

Following this perspective, social representations are the "stuff" (Moscovici, 2001) of common sense, which can be defined as : "[…] the stock of valid knowledge from which people draw in order to act and give meaning to the world daily" (Daudelin, 2008, p. 295, trans.). For Moscovici (1975; 1985; 1988), the priority in

[2] This article is part of the author's doctoral thesis on the construction of child psychological maltreatment as a public problem and child protection services' practices in Quebec. It is the first of four articles.

the study of social representations and communication should not be focused on their validation or disqualification. Indeed, his attention was rather drawn towards social representations' meaning-making capacity and how human society and their members, whilst creating and transforming their social representations, where giving sense to their world. In other words, when studying social representations of child psychological maltreatment and child abuse, we are not looking to validate them. We consider them as tools to better understand collective functioning and sense-making process with regard to the problem.

All social representations emerge from novelty and strangeness, and aim to "make something unfamiliar, or unfamiliarity itself, familiar" (Moscovici, 1984, p. 24). As stated by Marková (2007):

> Even if we can "know" and "represent" all imaginable phenomena, the theory of social representations and social communication studies specific types of representations. It studies and theorizes those social phenomena that have become, for one reason or another, matters of general concern. These phenomena, which are thought about and talked about, create tensions and lead to action. (Trans., p. 210)

In this sense, they are particularly relevant for the study of situations that are considered as problematic, such as child psychological maltreatment and child abuse. Moscovici (1961/1975/2004) described two communicative mechanisms conducting to the construction and transformation of social representations: objectivation and anchoring. They are two sides of the same coin (Marková, 2000; Moliner, 2015; Hokaköngäs & Sakki, 2016). The first, objectivation, constitutes the process by which an abstract and new idea or concept is transformed into a concrete object, a schematized and simplified image. As for anchoring, it refers to the process by which a new social representation is integrated within a network of pre-existing representations already shared by the group, simultaneously transforming and reshaping the latter (Hoïjer, 2011; Rateau & Lo Monaco, 2013). Finally, social representations also have a performative function in that they orient the field of possibilities in terms of actions or solutions.

Many actors are involved in the creation and transformation of social representations, among which stands the media. Indeed, discussion, advocacy and the evaluation of a social issue take place in the media (Blumer, 1971). Conversely, falsification, diversionary tactics, and the advancing of proposals likewise unfold within this sphere of influence (Blumer, 1971). The media therefore carries and diffuses various representations related to a given issue, whilst muting others. Moreover, mass media are not neutral. Indeed, media is influenced by the values and norms of its society of emergence. Further, as they are determined by various dynamics of power, they come to reproduce them by diffusing the voice of some social actors more than others (see Jovchelovitch, 2008) for a more detailed reflection on the subject of social representations and the public sphere. As explained by Thompson (1995), the media is also a powerful social agent with its own logics and mechanisms when it comes to representing issues. Its influence extends to the realm of politics and public provision (Thompson, 1995). Through its role in diffusing and influencing social representations in the public arena, media thus actively contributes to the construction and definition of public problems[3] such as child abuse as well as child psychological maltreatment (Blumer, 1971).

Objective, Method, and Materials

The study's objective was to understand how child psychological maltreatment integrated common sense

[3] Although Blumer used the term social problems in 1971, we use the term public problems in order to emphasize the processes of collective appropriation and definition of the problem, rather than on the issues that fall under an ontological consideration.

knowledge and social representations of child abuse through the media. This general objective was founded on the hypothesis that studying the social representations in the Quebec media, at the time of the last reform of the YPA, would allow us to understand how they contributed to the collective process of identifying child psychological maltreatment as a public problem. Similarly, we wondered how social representations may have oriented possible solutions to the problem.

Furthermore, we were inspired by the work of Hoïjer (2010; 2011) and Olausson (2010) and used the subcategories they developed to document the mobilization of social representations and representational dynamics in the media in the years surrounding the integration of child psychological ill-treatment into the YPA. Specifically, Hoïjer (2011) detailed the objectivation and anchoring processes into a set of subcategories that can be used as conceptual analytical tools in empirical analysis. It serves to study "how the media and citizens construct societal and political issues colouring our age […]" (p. 3). Drawing on examples from a qualitative study on climate change and the media, she explains how the anchoring process can be observed in text through five different means, by: naming the object, emotional anchoring, thematic anchoring, anchoring in antinomies, and anchoring in metaphors (Hoïjer, 2011). As for objectivation, it can be observed by means of emotional objectivation through the images used in the media, as well as through personification, identified when a phenomenon is linked to specific persons "such as when Freud personifies psychoanalysis or Ghandi's political struggle through non-violence" (Höijer, 2011, p. 13).

We collected articles from five daily newspapers published in Quebec between January 1, 2000 and December 31, 2010. According to the Center for Media Studies (2011), four of them were the most read daily newspapers during the targeted period (i.e. *Le Journal de Montréal*, *La Presse*, *Le Journal de Québec*, and *Le Soleil*). The last one, *Le Devoir*, was the most read independent newspaper[4]. The articles have been identified using Eureka database and the keywords youth protection, youth protection act, modification and psychological with various combinations. In the case of *Le Journal de Montréal*, we requested access to their archives. Finally, after having excluded the duplicates, a total of 80 articles were retained for analysis. More precisely, the sample consisted of 23 analyses[5], 20 news articles, 14 opinion articles, 12 columns, 5 scoops, 3 news reports, 2 interviews, and one editorial.

For each article, we identified, when applicable, the five anchoring and two objectivation subtypes described by Hoïjer (2011). Meanwhile, the more precise components of anchoring and objectivation types were codified following the qualitative analysis method of Miles, Huberman, and Hlady-Rispal (2007). This permitted the creation of a grid that enabled the identification of patterns relating these communication processes to discursive cornerstones, which will be discussed further in the next sections. In order to enhance the results' reliability and validity, a subset of items (11) was analyzed early on by an independent researcher to ensure interrater agreement. Firstly, an independent analysis of 6 articles using only Hoïjer's (2010) question-answer method led to the identification of various codes within each anchoring and objectivation sub-categories (see Appendix A for the analytical grid used). The codes retained were reliably identified by both the main researcher and her autonomous evaluator. Independent analyses of five additional articles were

[4] It should be noted that two groups owned the vast majority of Quebec's French-language press, namely Power Corporation and Quebecor. We found it pertinent to also retain the most read independent newspapers as well in our data collection in order to maximize the diversity of content.

[5] We used the typology developed by Sormany (2011) to distinguish the various types of articles. These types are distinguished by the analytical depth, the research work done by the journalist and the level of position taken by the journalist or the newspaper with regard to the subject.

then performed with the objective of testing the validity of the codes while simultaneously enriching and clarifying them.

It is important to note that, under a qualitative approach, the aim of this analysis is not to determine the mechanisms that appear most frequently in the material but to uncover those who are the most relevant to the integration of child psychological ill-treatment into common sense.

Finally, we wish to mention that the 2006 YPA's reform extends beyond the simple integration of child psychological ill-treatment to its jurisprudence. Hence, our analyses were also concerned with the more general notions of child abuse or maltreatment as well as other debates surrounding the reform. Nevertheless, when applicable, the analysis focussed principally on child psychological ill-treatment.

Results

The Objectivation of Child Abuse and Child Psychological Ill-Treatment

Child abuse, as well as child emotional abuse, was objectified in various articles, but not necessarily through pictures. Indeed, a majority of articles did not have associated images. When pictures were displayed, most consisted of a photo of the person cited in the text. Interestingly, images depicting children were rare, maybe because actually "showing" child abuse would be too much to bear[6]. The few opted to present a child alone, with one image clearly focussing on the child's helplessness and the inhumanity of his situation. This image, also the cover illustration of the polemic documentary *Thieves of Innocence* (Arcand & Robert, 2005), depicts a child locked in a cage trying to reach for its teddy bear. Another image is taken from the movie *Aurore* (Dionne & Robert, 2005). This last comment brings us to the process of objectivation by personification, which was observed a lot more frequently, starting with the story of Aurore Gagnon.

Personification and the case of Aurore Gagnon. Aurore Gagnon (1909-1920) was the victim of severe child abuse perpetrated by her stepmother and father. At the age of 10, Aurore died as a result of the abuse in Sainte-Philomène-de-Fortierville, a rural village in the Centre du Québec region. Even in the 1920s, her tragic story received a lot of attention, attracting hundreds of people to her stepmother's and father's trials. Her story was also re-enacted in theatrical pieces, books, and several movies. They all depict the horrors she was victim of (Bigras, 1952; Loranger, 2016). In 2015, Aurore was recognized as an historical figure by the *Patrimoine culturel du Québec*. In fact, in the French-speaking Quebec, the story of Aurore is common knowledge. In various articles, her story was used to stress the fact that child abuse was still a preoccupying issue in 2005:

> In a society focused on consumerism and appearance, it is unbearable to know that other Aurore are among us and go to bed every night, vulnerable, afraid, silently waiting for a responsible and sensitive adult to come to their aid […]. (Hotte, 2005) (Opinion article)

What is more, the last movie *Aurore* (Dionne & Robert, 2005) was released on July 8, 2005, only three months before the tabling of Bill 125 to amend the YPA and has reached one of the biggest box-office of the province's history. The persona of Aurore was thus present in various articles and explicitly discussed in relation with the announced Bill.

Aside from Aurore, the objectivation of child abuse by personification was also observed in many articles referring to child abuse stories in which the children were given names:

[6] In situations where the articles' subject was an actual child abuse case, no identificatory information surrounding the child can be published by law.

> Like that of *Sara*, who at the age of eight is physically assaulted by her mother's partner. [...] The *Marguerite*, ... and the *Stéphane*, neglected at an early age to the point of remaining in their excrement for a long time and being frequently abused […]. (Chouinard, 2005) (Analysis)
>
> For the first two years of her life, Juliette spent many months alone in a dark room. Her mother, who worked at night and therefore slept during the day, locked her little girl in her room all day long, with the lights closed and the TV on. (Gagnon, 2006) (Analysis)

Interestingly, child psychological maltreatment, even though not named as such, was present in some depictions of child abuse even before 2006. In an article released in 2005, for example, the stories of Philippe and Alexandra both depict situations of child exposure to domestic violence, a form of child psychological ill-treatment that will be stated in the YPA after the 2006 amendments:

> "Sometimes, when they fight, I'm afraid he'll kill my mother", says *Philippe*, 12, who lives in a blended family [...]. "When mom and dad were arguing very, very loudly, I was suffocating, I was running out of air. I wanted to die and at the same time I didn't want to... I felt like I was in a war", says *Alexandra*, also 12 years old. (Samson, 2005) (Analysis)

Another article published in 2004 introduced a typology of family dynamics that can lead to child psychological maltreatment. It refers to fairy tales and legends. For instance, the Mother Superior personifies a rigid and authoritative dynamic (as in Cinderella), the Ugly Duckling refers to the scapegoat child, the King and its Realm, a dominant and intolerant father, etc. (Samson, 2004) (Analysis).

Not less than 28 articles referred to at least one precise depiction or story of child abuse. It is also interesting to note that, if the children were personified with names, the same did not apply for the parents who were, in fact, referred to as the father, the mother or a mother, the parents, etc.

Furthermore, objectivation by personification, as is the case of Aurore or other children, was related to emotions of outrage towards parents and compassion towards children. As we will see in the next section, moral outrage and compassion also played a crucial part in anchoring child abuse as well as child psychological maltreatment.

The Anchoring of Child Abuse and Child Psychological Ill-Treatment

Emotional anchoring. In this article, we focus on three predominant emotions that were identified in media's anchoring process of child abuse and child psychological maltreatment: moral outrage, compassion, and fear.

Moral outrage. Child abuse was emotionally anchored in a fierce sentiment of outrage and indignation, firstly towards the parent(s). Outrage refers to: "a feeling of anger and shock" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021) or "the anger and resentment aroused by injury or insult" (Merriam Webster Dictionary, 2021). Furthermore, because the elicitor of outrage is not directly linked to readers' personal interests, we can more precisely identify the emotional anchoring of child abuse in the media into moral outrage. Moral outrage falls within the wider category of moral emotions, which are defined by Haidt (2003) as "[…] those emotions that are linked to the interests or welfare either of society as a whole or at least of persons other than the judge or agent" (p. 853). Indeed, moral outrage is a reaction to moral transgression and is grounded in anger (Batson et al., 2007; O'Mara, Jackson, Batson, & Gaertner, 2011; Tetlock, Kristel, Elson, Green, & Lerner, 2000) as well as disgust (Salerno & Peter-Hagene, 2013). What is more, following Haidt's (2003) typology of moral emotions, moral outrage is integrated into the "other-condemning" family; not only is it related to anger and disgust, it is also oriented towards something or someone considered to be responsible for the injustice depicted.

Concerning the moral outrage towards the parent(s) and their behaviours, it was mostly observed in the real or fictitious situations detailed in many articles, either as news coverage or in support of their message:

> When the social worker goes to Mom's house to negotiate visitation rights with her child, his response is brutal: "How much do you pay me to go see him?" (Gagnon, 2004) (Column)
>
> Specifically, the mother "sometimes used blunt objects, such as fly swatters, wooden spoons and cutting boards" to hit the children, either to punish them for their bad beating or to teach them better discipline. [...] While they pleaded guilty to the assault charges, the parents' act of contrition did not go much further. (Thibault, 2005) (Scoop)
>
> An unworthy mother, who had seriously brutalized her three children for 18 years, [...] The children were beaten almost every day. For example, they were not allowed to cry: the mother would sit astride their chests and block their mouths to punish them. They were constantly beaten with fists, feet, sticks and even hammers. The little ones could be locked up for hours in the pantry. (Morissette, 2005) (Scoop)
>
> A father who leaves his daughter asleep in his car while looking for a prostitute, a stripper who abandons her toddler at night with only the TV on, a mother who relinquishes custody of her child by leaving him alone for four days at the Gatineau Hot Air Balloon Festival. (Dugas, 2006) (Column)

The severity of the situations cited activates a reaction of outrage and even disgust towards the parents.

Naming child abuse was also linked to emotional anchoring in many articles. Indeed, when child abuse was not stated in reference to legal categories, we could see that it was either associated mainly with parental behaviours or with the children's experiences. For one, the notion of children-martyrs (*enfants martyrs*) refers directly to torture and focuses on the parents' outrageous behaviour. The purposeful characterization of abused children as "tyrannized" does the same, just as efficiently as "infants that are abused and neglected by their parents". On the other end, by identifying child abuse as a child's terrible experience, it focuses on these children's victimization through describing them as deprived children, thereby triggering the emotions that play a part in its anchoring.

Compassion. This last comment brings us to the second emotion involved in child abuse's anchoring process: compassion. As with moral outrage, compassion is also a moral emotion and can be seen as its counterpart. For Haidt (2003), compassion is integrated into the "other-suffering" family of moral emotions. Aside from the detailed situations of child abuse, the emotional anchoring of compassion was observed in the journalists' choice of wording, which was oriented towards the children's helplessness. They were namely cited as "innocent victims", "helpless", "YPD's children", or "YPD's youth". The underlying compassionate tone could also be noted in some of the more detailed descriptions of a child's experience of placement:

> Children's lives have been sacrificed as they have been shuffled from placement to placement, waiting in vain for their parents to be able to take them back. (Gagnon, 2005) (Column)

Whether because of their experiences within their family or resulting from their institutionalization, children are the recipients of compassion from the media.

Interestingly, some articles also anchored child abuse in the compassion towards the parent(s), seen dually as sick and "incapable of doing otherwise" (Asselin, 2003) (Interview):

> Parents sometimes themselves former victims of physical abuse or negligence who reproduce, for lack of knowing what parental benevolence is, what they have known as models with their own children. (Clément, 2005) (Column)
>
> And for those who do seemingly incomprehensible things, you need to know their own story. "The vast majority have terrible personal histories. They have been abused, neglected, [...] How can they give what they did not receive?" (Asselin, 2003) (Interview)

Compassion was also supported by the depiction of the terrible child abusive families' living conditions:

> The immense poverty of these families upsets me [...] these families really live in conditions of intolerable poverty. (Bégin, 2000) (News article)

More rarely, the lack of helping resources for the families was also emphasized:

> The problem of abuse cannot be addressed without taking into account the chronic lack of resources to help families and the difficulty of accessing public social services. [...] Where can a family turn when it encounters problems with its child, when it is at the end of its rope and feels it has no resources to deal with the difficulties it faces? (Manque de ressources, 2006) (News report)

Additionally, the anchoring of child abuse into moral outrage and compassion was also intertwined with another pregnant emotion: fear.

Fear. As a general category of emotional anchoring, fear was present in more than half of the articles (n = 46) and in every type of articles. Indeed, the notion of risk, whether imminent in the child's future or for society's future "well-being" seems inextricably linked to child abuse, as well as child psychological ill-treatment. As explained by Hoïjer (2010): "Fear is an emotion that may be generated by the thought of bad things that may happen in the future. It may also, of course, be awoken by a present state of affairs that is experienced as dangerous or threatening" (p. 721).

The articles we studied anchored child abuse in emotions of fear firstly by emphasizing the deleterious repercussions for the child for his future as an adult. In particular, child abuse was conceived as increasing the risk of children becoming themselves ill-treating parents:

> But the saddest part of these stories is that these little Aurore of our time run the risk of becoming, as adults, Marie-Anne Houde [Aurore's murderous stepmother] with their own children. (Gagnon, 2005) (Column)
>
> In cases of chronic neglect, it would be better, according to them [non specified specialists], to give these children up for adoption so that they can get by and not reproduce in their adult lives the situations from which they have suffered so much. (Canadian Press, 2004) (News article)

Other specific risks were pointed out concerning the abused children's future, such as homelessness, instability, substance abuse, and delinquency:

> Being on the street is a real risk for teens in the Youth Protection Services. (Allard, 2007) (News report)
>
> Have we forgotten that the dropout, the neglected child, the young offender, the teenager with substance abuse or serious mental health problems, the future criminal and welfare recipient is very often the same child? (Moreau, 2000) (Opinion comment)

Oftentimes, the risk or threat encountered by the child remained unspecified while simultaneously being depicted as catastrophic.

> […] *painful and catastrophic consequences* for thousands of children. (Moreau, 2000) (Opinion comment)
>
> For a child in full development of his personality, *the ravages can be major*. (Samson, 2004) (Analysis)
>
> We don't want the child to *pay a high price* because we didn't act quickly enough and in an extremely firm manner. We want a guarantee that there will be no children who will be *permanently harmed.* (Breton, 2005) (News article)
>
> When [more severe cases of violence are] combined with psychological abuse such as bullying or emotional rejection, their *aftermath is particularly damaging* to the child. (Clément, 2005) (Column)

The fear around child abuse was also supported by metaphors linking its repercussions to the impeding threats that they may pose, namely by comparing youths who had been victimized to "time bombs" (Larouche,

2001) (News article), “Pandora’s box” (Asselin, 2003) (Interview), as being “practically finished” (Papineau, 2005) (Opinion comment), or ready to become “little monsters” (Clément, 2005) (Analysis).

More dramatically still, the emotional anchoring of child abuse was also related to the fear of the child’s death, whether as a direct result of the abuse or from the greater risk of suicide that follows:

> [S]exually abused children (for example) are at risk...ten times more likely to commit suicide […] these suicidal adolescents […]. (Moreau, 2000) (Opinion comment)
>
> Nearly 40 percent of babies who die accidentally each year in Quebec die as a result of violence inflicted by their parents, including shaken baby syndrome. (Canadian Press, 2005) (News article)

When not centered on the repercussions on the child, fear was fuelled by the risk associated with the social services’ failure. Here again, the consequences for the youth were outlined, for instance, with the negatively impacted attachment development capacity of frequently displaced children subjected to changes of custody. The risk for the children to become ill-treating parents was also pointed out as a potential result of the social services’ inadequacy.

While equally as important as the severe consequences of child abuse, we found that the emotional anchoring of fear relies on the emphasis placed on the ubiquity of the problem, so doing highlighting society’s lack of control over the problem:

> Aurore is among us. (Clément, 2005) (Column)
>
> There are many other little Aurore Gagnon in Quebec these days. (Gagnon, 2005) (Column)
>
> Domestic violence has soared in Quebec, as it has throughout North America […] We are facing an outbreak of violence. (Canadian Press, 2005) (News article)
>
> One case among others: That of the shaken baby. (Gagnon, 2005) (Analysis)

These findings echo an observation by Nussbaum (2001) when he referred to Aristotle, “[…] in order to be afraid ‘I must believe that bad events are impeding; that they are not trivially, but seriously bad; and that I am not entirely in control of warding them off’” (p. 28). Here, the choice of wording as well as the references to Aurore, who died as a dire consequence of severe abuse, contribute to the sentiment of lack of control over the problem of child abuse. Contrary to the emotions of outrage and compassion described before, fear is not in itself a moral emotion and, with regards to the emotional anchoring of child abuse, it contributes to further anchoring the latter into a crisis mentality which will be discussed later in the article.

To sum up our results from the emotional anchoring analysis, we can see that the narrative of the media on child abuse and child psychological ill-treatment centers on moral emotions, furthering child abuse’s relation to our sense of justice (Haidt, 2003). Fear, the sole non-morale motion identified, serves to lend credence to the statement that child abuse is a serious public problem. When we concern ourselves specifically with child psychological ill-treatment, we find that it does not trigger different emotions than more “traditional” forms of abuse. This is supported in text by the fact that the emotional anchoring of child abuse interacted with other anchoring subcategories proposed by Hoïjer (2011), starting with the anchoring by metaphors.

Anchoring by metaphors. Everyday language is permeated with metaphors that allow individuals to imagine abstract things or phenomena as something else, for example “time is money” or “life is a journey” (Hoïjer, 2011). Some authors, like Lakoff and Johnson (2003), even claim that all thought and communication is basically metaphoric. In fact, metaphors play a major role in what we could name the cultural assimilation of social representations (Hoïjer, 2011).

We observed many metaphors in the articles that we analyzed. We will preface our inquiry by focussing on the metaphors used to describe or talk about child psychological ill-treatment. We shall then continue with the three major categories of metaphors identified in articles, namely metaphors concerning child abuse, concerning childhood and, at last, metaphors concerning social services or child protection services' intervention.

Metaphors about child psychological ill-treatment. As we mentioned earlier, child psychological ill-treatment was not always explicitly discussed among the mass media articles. Often, psychological ill-treatment to a child was comprised within a list specifying the situations involving the development or safety of a child. The process of enumeration reflects that, in many cases, child psychological maltreatment is considered or at least presented as a form of child abuse, equal to child physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, etc. When child psychological ill-treatment was more specifically discussed, the focus was often put on its "invisibility" in comparison to child physical abuse. In that respect, child physical abuse becomes a metaphor that portrays child psychological maltreatment as having equivalent, if not worst consequences:

> […] children are fairly well protected from visible, "palpable" dangers, especially from physical abuse, he points out. But the greater the psychological danger, the more aberrant the decisions become [...] These *invisible violence* […]. (Vincent, 2003) (Editorial)
>
> Words that hurt. (Samson, 2004) (Analysis)
>
> Without this mention, the DPJ can hardly help young victims of this *invisible violence*. [...] However, Mr. Trocme's research indicates that it is the other cases that develop the most serious problems because they do not receive support. (Normandin, 2004) (Analysis)

Metaphors about child abuse. Regarding child abuse, the most salient metaphors described it as an illness. This likeness is found in the way child abuse was repeatedly identified as being "transmissible" from one generation to another. For example, articles would refer to the "theory that neglect and abuse are passed on from one generation to the next" (Paré, 2000) (News article), to the "intergenerational transmission of maladjustment factors" (Moreau, 2000) (Opinion comment) or portrayed parents as "transgenerational victims" (Leclerc, 2005) (Opinion comment).

Here, these semantic choices are significant as they not only portray child abuse as a medical problem, but also implicitly depict it as incurable, in similar fashion to congenital disorders. This places the metaphoric medical anchoring of child abuse in relation to the social representations of abusive parents described earlier as being incapable of acting otherwise. In other words, parents are metaphorically depicted as having an incurable disease with their children on the verge of developing the same type of illness.

Likewise, children were similarly described as being "handicapped":

> These two tragic years made Juliette a handicapped of the soul. (Gagnon, 2006) (Analysis)

We also noted the use of a medical vocabulary when speaking of, for instance, the "diagnosis" of ill-treating acts [Vincent, 2003 (Editorial); Gagnon, 2005 (Analysis)].

The lapse of curability of such "diagnosis" thereby comes into play, with child abuse not only metaphorically compared to an illness but also seen as having a very limited time lapse for "treatment":

> Attachment [...] functions as a window of time. It opens around six months and closes [...]. It is at the base of our mental spine. [...] We do not cure these disorders, we can only prevent them from happening. And we have very little time. [...] The window of time has closed; the human brain, in this period of attachment, does not wait. (Leclerc, 2005) (Opinion comment)

> Opportunities open and close in the brain of young children. [...] If it closes without being filled, it is irreversible. (Clément, 2005) (Analysis)

While the notion of the intergenerational transmission of violence is not new in the field of research about child abuse, it cannot be considered old either. For Hacking (1999), the theory emerged shortly after the 1962[7] publication of Kempe et al. where his collaborative article rapidly gained in popularity. Being a paediatrician, it is not surprising that Kempe drew on a medical vocabulary to describe the phenomena of child abuse. As stated by Hacking (1999):

> "[…] cruelty to children was not a medical problem, while child abuse was medicalized from the beginning. The idea was brought forward by paediatricians. Child abusers were described as ill. […]". (p. 135)

Looking further into the development of intergenerational approaches, we can observe the major influence of medical doctors or psychiatrists, for example Murray Bowen (Bowen family system theory), Salvador Minuchin (structural family therapy), and Ivàn Boszormenyi-Nagy (contextual therapy). As for attachment, its first theoretical development was also the work of a doctor, John Bowlby. Noteworthy here is the adoption of these theoretical notions within mass media without any reference to their original field or definition.

More convincingly still, other metaphors also related child abuse to death, for example by comparing abused children to "ghosts" or stating that an abused child is "practically finished" (Gagnon, 2006) (Analysis).

Metaphors about children and childhood. In opposition with metaphors about child abuse, the metaphors about children and childhood described it as fundamentally good: "a gift to the human race" (Julien, 2005) (Column). Interestingly, childhood was very often explicitly related to the children's attachment needs: "The theft of childhood is the theft of attachment" (Leclerc, 2005) (Opinion comment). And, as we saw before, attachment itself was portrayed as being not only fragile, but very time sensitive. This idea is supported by the fact that the psychological needs of children were compared to food: "The psycho-emotional needs are a fundamental food for the harmonious development of the child" (Julien, 2005) (Column).

In summary, we have seen how metaphors are widely used in the mass media articles we analyzed, starting with those who compared child psychological maltreatment to child physical abuse in light of its severity and consequences. Child abuse was metaphorically compared to a transmissible disease, with abusive parents being seen as sick and their abused children as either risking the development of the same disease or as already emotionally irrecoverable. Conversely, children and childhood were both seen as being fundamentally good. We however noted the use of metaphors to denounce the inadequacies of child protection services. Ultimately, metaphors made abstract phenomenon, such as child abuse and childhood, more comprehensible. They were further intertwined with the forms of emotional anchoring analyzed before. To illustrate, metaphors comparing child abuse to a disease both fuelled an emotional anchoring of the concept to fear and compassion, whereas metaphors about children and childhood served to increase compassion towards children as well as moral outrage towards the parents. Looking at those various interconnections between anchoring and objectivation subcategories of child abuse and child psychological ill-treatment allowed us to identify the components of thematic anchoring in press, a deeper form of anchoring described by Hoïjer (2011).

[7] For several authors, the very emergence of the concept of intra-family child abuse is attributable to the work of Kempe and his team of Denver paediatricians with the 1962 publication of their article entitled "The battered child syndrome" (Labbé, 2019; Hacking, 1999; Pfohl, 1977; Gelles, 1975).

Thematic anchoring. Moscovici and Vignaux (1994) defined the concept of thêmata as "deeply rooted primary conceptions, informing science as well as our *apperception* of it. These 'primitive notions' take part in as many original layers of cognition as they inform the world's archetypal images, its structure and its genesis" (p. 45, trans.). Thêmata are underlying ideas and notions that structure new social representations (Moscovici, 2004). Thus, thêmata have a classifying function with regard to new social representations' formation and integration into bigger, deeply culturally rooted categories.

Those primitive notions mainly take the form of two oppositional ideas, thus forming a categorical dyad: life/death, justice/injustice, etc. Generally, one dyadic pole is considered positive and the other, negative.

In this article, we focus on two prominent thematic oppositions which support the representation of child abuse and child psychological ill-treatment: Justice/Injustice and Self/Other[8].

Justice/Injustice. As we saw earlier, child abuse is emotionally anchored into moral emotions, namely moral outrage and compassion. These emotions pertain, on the one hand, to the "other-condemning" family and, one the other hand, to the "other-suffering" one, which both relate to the thêmata of justice and injustice (Haidt, 2003). Firstly, these moral emotions are both a reaction to something considered to be unjust, in this instance the ill-treatment of children. Second, these emotions both involve an ambition to redress injustice. Indeed, we observed a great number of examples reflecting the thematic anchoring of child abuse' social representations into justice/injustice through specific rhetorical strategies. More precisely, many articles used antinomies to explain what should be done to help children, and therefore redress injustice, as opposed to what should be avoided. Here, a particular topic being discussed and debated was the definitive removal of a child from its parental custody after a certain period of time of placement. It was, in many articles, presented as the best solution.

> But the crux of this bill is the time limits that will now be imposed on parents, who will have one to two years to get their act together or lose custody of their child permanently. Some people think these changes are cruel. But this heartbreaking issue must be viewed from the child's perspective. (Gagnon, 2005) (Column)
>
> Currently, a child in youth protection wanders for years between his or her natural parents and a foster family before the court decides. (Breton, 2005) (News article)
>
> The Marguerite [...] and the Stéphane [...] might have wished for adoption rather than the maintenance of a negligible family link, the DPJ explained yesterday. (Chouinard, 2005) (Analysis)

In contrast, justice was associated with a better distribution of resources to families and a preventive approach to avoid family dislocation.

> Preventing rather than curing. (Breton, 2000) (Column)
>
> Aurore will be with us as long as issues such as poverty, crime, addiction, depression, isolation and lack of support are present in the lives of parents and their children. (Clément, 2005) (Column)

More rarely, articles opted to focus on the fact that, without adequate support measures, adoption could also constitute an injustice:

Can we systematize human behavior to this extent without creating a situation of injustice for all those young people who will have been removed from their families without their families having been truly helped (Lemieux, 2006) (Opinion comment)?

[8] By "self", this paper refers to one's in-group as well as individual self. By "other", this paper refers to those one related to as out-groups. This is in line with the social representations theory position on the social nature of identity (see Smith, O'Connor, & Joffe, 2015).

The justice and injustice thêmata were also observed in articles opposing children's rights to parental rights:

> In these two conflicting rights, that of the parents to retain custody of their children and that of the children to have a normal childhood, it is the latter that must prevail. (Gagnon, 2005) (Column)
>
> [There are] two camps: the first fears that early legal intervention would limit the rights of the natural parents, while the second believes that such early action would benefit the children in the long term. The dilemma between the predominance of the family bond and the absolute interest of the child is therefore still palpable. (Chouinard, 2005) (Analysis)

Self/Other. Our analysis further uncovered the discursive distinction in the media between abusive families, which are considered as one's out-group and the "Other", and "caring" families, which are considered as one's in-group and the "Self". The Self/Other thêmata's emergence resulted from a careful observation of the influence and interaction of the anchoring mechanisms employed by the press. As was the case for the justice/injustice thêmata, the root of the thêmata could be traced back to the media's emotional anchoring of child abuse. Again, moral outrage played a significant role. Indeed, it is not difficult to see how this emotion directly supports the argument that ill-treating behaviours should be condoned and that people who perpetuate them are to be labelled as outcasts. Below are some examples:

> Don't tell me that you also take the side of the biological parents, even when they show themselves unworthy of their role? (Deschâtelets, 2008) (Opinion comment)
>
> Some estimate that 10-15% of the families tracked by authorities have a combination of psychological and social characteristics that make them highly unresponsive to interventions. These parents are often afflicted with mental health issues, substance abuse. When all of these factors are present, the coast is almost impossible to climb. (Gagnon, 2004) (Column)
>
> We must destroy the myth that the parental instinct exists in all fathers and mothers. "Some people repeat situations of abandonment or abuse that they experienced in their childhood", [...] "It is difficult to give what you have not received". (Dugas, 2006) (Scoop)

Specific depictions of child abuse stories had the same results.

> The baby, removed in time from the delirium of a mother who scratched him on the inside of his cheeks so that the social services would not notice, was entrusted to a foster family, where he became attached. If, at the age of three or four, the mother, cured, wants to be entrusted with him again and we say yes to her, it is this child who is murdered. (Leclerc, 2005) (Opinion comment)

Hence, not only does moral outrage foster an us-versus-them environment by shedding light on behaviours that are not tolerated within a group, the feeling of outrage that it inspires can also provoke a sense of moral superiority or, as Apter (2018) put it, a "narcissistic shiver". In other words, feeling outraged actually proves how distant one can be from the condemned phenomenon and cleans that person from any association with it (Apter, 2018). By feeling moral outrage, individuals prove that they are part of a morally superior group, which condemn the ill-behaving inferior individuals who thus form a different group.

Interestingly, the emotional anchoring into compassion also contributes to the division between "abusive families" (Other) and "caring families" (Self). For example, the emotional anchoring of compassion towards ill-treating families also implies that those families form a distinguishable and definite group, whose members share a number of traits, ranging from having been victimized during their childhood to teenage pregnancy, intellectual deficiency, drug addiction, alcoholism, depression, cancer predominance, cigarette smoking, mental health disorders and more.

> This is where the parents come in. We have not yet collectively understood that some cannot be. And, most often, it is because they themselves are carriers of attachment disorders and transgenerational victims. This is the Italian notion, taken up by Dr. Maurice Berger, of parental untreatability. (Leclerc, 2005) (Opinion comment)
>
> Heartbreaking cases: [...] The mom didn't know how to bathe or stimulate her. She was anxious when she gave the bottle. The little girl had lost a lot of weight. The parents underwent a psychological analysis. [...] The diagnosis of disability [in the parents] was confirmed. (Clément, 2005) (Analysis)
>
> This teenage mother—she had her daughter when she was 18—spent her childhood moving from foster home to foster home. This morning, she obviously feels like she's taking an exam. With good reason. The doctors' report will be submitted to the judge who will decide on her daughter's fate. (Gagnon, 2006) (Analysis)

For the vast majority of the articles retained for this study, child abuse was indeed associated with various other social and public health issues. Thus, the problem is seen as comprising a whole range of other problems that already distinguish the "normal" population from the "abnormal" one. The metaphoric anchoring's reliance on concepts from the medical field also contributes to this foundational thematic anchoring of Self/Other. Indeed, ill-treating families are seen as being a specific group that share a transmissible disease. Here again, even compassion for the incompetent parents reinforces their representational integration into the "Other" category.

To summarize, the analysis of the 80 newspaper articles allowed us to ponder the influence of the anchoring and objectivation mechanisms in various types of narratives. This enabled us to fulfill the research aim of understanding how psychological abuse becomes part of common sense through the media. Indeed, we could identify examples for each category of anchoring, as well as objectivation, in the media. Furthermore, the interconnection of these different categories allowed us to identify two specific forms of thematic anchoring of child abuse and child psychological maltreatment. The next section will discuss the implications of these results.

Discussion

Our discussion focuses on three main topics, starting with a brief reflection on our results which show that the social representation of child psychological ill-treatment is indistinguishable from that of child abuse. Secondly, we will argue the process of othering that emerged from the many forms of anchoring and objectivation that we observed. Thirdly, we will discuss the potential implications of the "crisis mentality" surrounding media narratives on child abuse and child psychological maltreatment.

The Social Representation of Child Psychological Ill-Treatment and the Social Representation of Child Abuse

Results from our analysis show that media represents child psychological maltreatment as a form of child abuse. In fact, it is rarely explicitly mentioned and when it is, journalists describe child psychological ill-treatment as child abuse. We also saw how physical violence was used on a discursive level to anchor psychological maltreatment. Under the social representations theory, this indicates an interlocking relationship (Pianelli, Abric, & Saad, 2010) between child psychological ill-treatment and child abuse, meaning that the former can only be understood through the lens of an already existing social representation of child abuse.

We argue that this was the case even before 2006. For example, in a study conducted in 2000, Gagné and Bouchard (2001) showed that the impacts of child psychological maltreatment were considered at least as severe as those of physical abuse by parents and practitioners from Quebec. Thus, we know that the notion of child psychological ill-treatment was not per se a new idea for people in Quebec. The widespread

acknowledgement in the population that psychological ill-treatment is a problem could explain the fact that journalists had no problem considering it a form of child abuse requiring the intervention of youth protection, in contrast to what could be observed in the scientific literature on the subject of the time (Glaser & Prior, 1997; Loue, 2005; O'Hagan, 1995). Differences of opinion, however, were directed towards sanctioning child abuse and reiterating its inadmissibility. Anchoring and objectivation played an important role in keeping the problem and the people affected by it at a safe distance, mostly by othering the perpetrators.

Othering Abusive Families

"Othering" is a collective response that has been documented in association with many public problems. The othering process allows the members of a given group to protect their worldviews by associating problems and their causes with other groups, which are generally already marginalized (Caillaud, Bonnot, Ratiu, & Krauth-Gruber, 2015; Mayor et al., 2012). Moreover, the process of othering allows the group that benefit from it to reduce the perception of threat, discomfort, and anxiety (Páez & Pérez, 2020).

Studies on othering process have often identified a culturally specific group or national "out-group" associated with a given problem or threat. For example, Gilles et al. (2013) cited the way in which diseases have been named in the past. In the 15th century, syphilis was simultaneously referred to as "French pox" by the English, morbus Germanicus by the French, and "Chinese disease" by the Japanese. In fact, the othering process and the out-group blame representational dynamic are quite striking when it comes to various emerging infectious diseases (for a literature review on the subject, see Smith, O'Connor, & Joffe, 2015). More recently, we observed the same phenomenon with the various names given to the COVID-19 variants (India, Brazil, South Africa, and UK variants).

In our study, though, othering did not appear to be contextual but was rather salient. This may indicate that the othering process as it pertains to child abuse is not part of a collective coping strategy, which would be an "emergency response to what a collectivity perceives and construes as a challenge to their established way of life" (Wagner, Kronberger, & Seifert, 2002, p. 326). Instead, it may be part of a normalization process and discourse on child abuse, as well as child psychological maltreatment, which allows the topic to be talked about in the mass media without posing a threat to the group's identity. Here, social representations become a means of protection against unwelcome emotions (Joffe, 1999; 2011). Therefore, the othering process observed in Quebec's media falls closer to collective narcissism (Cichocka, 2016). Indeed, collective narcissism describes "an in-group identification tied to an emotional investment in an unrealistic belief about the unparalleled greatness of an in-group" (de Zavala, Cichocka, Eidelson, & Jayawickreme, 2009, p. 1074). In the same vein, the othering process also echoes the identity-protective function of common sense (Smith et al., 2015). Thus, the othering process allows and even encourages avoidance measures to be taken (Hadarics, Szabó, & Kende, 2020).

Additionally, our results show that if abusive families represent a distinguishable group within society, it is not clear what characteristics unite them. As we saw earlier, the characteristics listed in the articles cover a broad range, from teenage pregnancy to tobacco addiction to higher incidence of cancer, to name a few. This observation reminds us of Lorenzi-Cioldi's (1995; 2002/2009) model of the self in collection and aggregate groups. In his model, the author draws our attention to the many contradictions embedded in the representations of marginalized and dominated groups. More precisely, the author shows how dominated groups are homogenized within a representation generated by dominant people and where various distinct aspects of social

reality are aggregated together. Notwithstanding the fact that a great deal of social issues and difficulties can enhance the risk of child abuse, the media simultaneously elevates the identity of people affiliated with the in-group and the self by linking child abuse to various devalued groups (drug addicts, single mothers, poor people, drinkers). In doing so, it reinforces its own group identity and sense of superiority over previously marginalized groups (Lorenzi-Cioldi, 2002/2009). It should also be mentioned that child abuse and especially psychological ill-treatment does not occur only in these groups (Clément et al., 2019). In fact, it seems that the association of parental abusive behaviors with specific group is historically rooted and has played an important role in the public understanding and interpretation of the problem of child abuse. Indeed, even before 1962 and the emergence of child abuse as a public problem, violence against children was already associated with specific groups. For example, Turmel (2017) and Cliche (2007) both showed how, in the Quebec of the 1920s, situations of abandonment, neglect or violence received different interpretations and responses by the clergy depending on whether they occurred in families regarded as being "good poor" or "bad poor".

In the same line of thought, many historians and sociologists have explored the reasons that could explain Aurore's impregnation into the collective memory. For Cliche (2011), the fact that she came from "a good Christian family" made her story stand out from other similar tragic cases of child abuse and infanticide. Here, the idea that child abuse could happen in "good" caring families gave rise to these tensions. With regard to our results, these tensions endure with the persistent idea that child abuse, including child psychological maltreatment, only happens in "those" families. In their study, Joffe and Staerklé (2007) also showed that out-group blame is often anchored in the pre-existing representations that accompany them.

The emergence of the self/other thêmata and its link to the othering process also shows how taboo child abuse actually is, something that already stood out in Hacking's (1999) work:

> […] for all that we would like an objective concept about which expert knowledge is possible, the idea of harming innocent children is powerfully moral. In our present system of values, genocide is the worst thing that one group of people can do to another. Abusing a child is the worst thing that one person can do to another. (p. 132)

This, in turn, brings us to the solutions that can be put in place and that are considered morally and normatively acceptable. As already noticed by other researchers, those deemed responsible for abusing children are not perceived as deserving of the public's help (Lonne & Gillespie, 2014).

Another important element emerged from our analysis and that can be influential in the construction of common sense knowledge on child psychological maltreatment as well as the considered solutions. Not only are the perpetrators maintained at a safe distance, but the discursive treatment of child psychological maltreatment and child abuse in general was also integrated into a "crisis mentality" surrounding the problem. We will focus on this element in the final section.

Crisis Mentality

We mentioned earlier how many authors make an association between othering and the perceived level of threat or risk (Gilles et al., 2013; Jodelet, 2020; Olausson, 2010). In our case, though, child abuse is not new and the definition of child psychological ill-treatment as a form of child abuse did not trigger any disagreement. Thus, the threat that it poses is not related to its novelty of its discovery. Moreover, the articles were not, as a whole or with regard to specific years, written in reaction to a particular crisis or outstanding new information about child abuse. Even though they were written in reaction to "something", whether the release of a national study on child abuse [e.g. the public release of the first Canadian Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect

(CIS-1998)], the publication of YPD' annual reports, the announcement of the tabling of the Bill 125, neighbourhood scandal, the death of a child or culturally critical movies (*Thieves of Innocence*, *Aurore*), child abuse was never depicted as a "new threat". Also important is how the objectivation as well as the anchoring mechanisms that we observed did not particularly change or evolve in our sample. Both of these observations led us away from a media's reaction to a particular crisis, but to the identification of a "crisis mentality" surrounding the social representation of child abuse in the Quebec's mass media.

In fact, moral outrage and the crisis mentality, which relate to the notion of risk and the emotion of fear, seem to play a major role in the acquisition of what Blumer (1971) called the "social credibility" of a public problem, a necessity if it is to be considered legitimate and serious. Hence, it is not surprising to see that crisis mentality is a typical approach to many public problems, as they rely heavily on social acceptability, charitable contributions, and other uneven sources of revenue (Hamby, 2014). It does indeed provoke a sense of emergency and urges the public to an immediate (and serious) reaction. For example, throughout a series of publications, Jagannathan and Camasso (2011; 2013; 2017) showed that tragic events exerted an enormous pressure on child protection services, provoking an important reassessment of the way they operate. They also showed that tragedies have effects on laws and policy making.

However, combined with an othering representational dynamic and collective narcissism, it can have important deleterious effects and fuel a range of inadequate defensive responses, such as overt aggression and lack of empathy (Cichocka, 2016; Górska et al., 2020). Elsewhere, moral outrage related to child molestation has also been associated with dehumanization of offenders, which were perceived as less suitable for rehabilitation (Bastian, Denson, & Haslam, 2013). More importantly, these offenders are not seen as good candidates for intervention, as is also shown in our results with regard to the justice/injustice thêmata. One cannot really help abusive families; one can only try to prevent the worst from happening.

As stated by Hamby (2014), the crisis mentality approach comes with the added cost of suppressing good news. Indeed, it is rare to hear or read a story about parents who went through a rough patch, developed a drug addiction and lost custody of their child, came back, regained their parental rights and took good care of their child for years to come. In actuality, we know that many interventions do have a margin of success (Lonne & Parton, 2014). Additionally, the tragic depictions of child abuse as well as the stated risk for the victims' future do not provide any hope. This bears a deleterious effect not only for the victims themselves but also for practitioners. For Wilson and Puckett (2011), reform initiatives driven by public moral outrage may also have unintended consequences that worsen the situation, such as emphasizing an exaggerated focus on the "idiosyncratic fact pattern of a single case" or pushing for the excessive search of a single culprit within child protection services.

Alternatively, as suggested by Hoïjer (2011), the anchoring in metaphors may serve ideological and legitimating functions. As stated by Gilliom (1996):

> "[…] social crisis help elite generate consent among the mass public. In doing so, potential conflict is avoided as people applaud rather than protest policies that they might oppose in the absence of a crisis". (p. 12)

Notwithstanding the dramatic consequences of child abuse and child psychological maltreatment, this "all or nothing" approach embedded in an emergency response perspective omits questioning other social measures which could target the structural causes of child abuse. As for many public problems, the career and fate of

child abuse do not depend on its victims or on the families directly concerned by the problem. And as for other public problems, there is a real possibility that the official definition of the problem reinforces social inequalities that are already existent instead of mitigating them. It is an undesirable outcome that should be kept in mind, especially considering the Self vs. Other environment in which the social representation of child abuse is anchored.

Conclusions

In this article, we documented the mobilization of social representations and representational dynamics in the media during the years surrounding the integration of child psychological ill-treatment into the Quebec's YPA. The results of the objectivation and anchoring mechanisms analyses show that child psychological abuse is directly dependent on the social representations already constituted of child abuse. Furthermore, our findings show that both subtypes of objectivation, emotional anchoring and anchoring by metaphors all play a role in the thematic anchoring of child abuse into the thêmata opposing justice and injustice as well as the self and other. By doing so, we can see that the media's narrative around child abuse and child psychological ill-treatment refers to the defensive function of the social representations which is manifested mainly through a process of othering. Further research is necessary in order to study the social representations' role and the influence of the othering process at a more practical level and in the decision-making process.

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Appendix A—Analytical Grid

Representations of Child Abuse and Child Psychological Ill-Treatment in Quebec Print Media: Separating the Tare from the Wheat.

Categories of anchoring

Naming

How is child abuse named in the article?

How is child psychological maltreatment named in the article?

Emotional anchoring

Which emotions does the news media reporting on child abuse encompass?

Which emotions does the news media reporting on child psychological maltreatment encompass?

Anchoring by metaphors

Which metaphors are used and how?

Anchoring by antinomies

Which antinomies are used and how?

Thematic anchoring

Can we link the above categories to thêmata and if so, how?

Categories of objectivation

Personification

Is there any specific person related to the problem of child abuse in the article and if so, how is she or he related to the problem?

Is there any specific person related to the problem of child psychological maltreatment in the article and if so, how is she or he related to the problem?

Emotional objectivation

Which emotions does the image linked to the article encompass?

Are there any emotions linked to the process of objectivation by personification and if so, which ones?